
UNIT 6 INSTITUTIONS I: KINSHIP, FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit a learner would be able to describe:

- kinship terms, relations and how kinship is traced;
- formation of a family, different types of families based on marriage and the rules of residence after marriage; and
- the notion of marriage, types of marriages prevalent in different societies, rules of marriage in a society that defines whom to marry.

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Every human being belongs to a society. They become the members of a society by virtue of their birth. It is the norms and values of a society that shapes the life of a human being. In this unit we will look into the relationships that constitute our core groups; kinship, family and marriage. How each relationship is intertwined and shapes our lives.

6.1 KINSHIP

6.1.1 Idea of Kinship

Let us attend a wedding to understand the core concepts of kinship, family and marriage as an example. Herein, taking a bride and groom as our example we would first try to identify the kin groups and relations one acquires by birth and by marriage. The understanding of kin groups is important as kinship is the basic principle which decides whom a person can marry and who is out of bounds. Kinship also determines the pattern of descent, lineage, inheritance, power and authority in a family. Some of the basic concepts and terminologies used in kinship would also be discussed herein. The genealogical method which helps in drawing the family tree would be explained in this section.

With the example of the wedding let us understand what kinship is. In a wedding we see two families- the groom's family and the bride's family. The people who attend the marriage are usually attached to either of the two families by birth or by marriage. These relations are known as kinship relations. So how do we acquire kinship relations? There are basically two ways of acquiring kinship relations **a. by birth** and **b. by marriage**.

6.1.2 Real versus Fictive Kinship

Taking the bride and the groom as example let us understand their kinship relations. Who are the relations by birth for the bride? The bride's immediate family- father, mother and her siblings (brothers and sisters) and her relations from paternal and maternal sides are relations by birth or blood. Anthropologically we call these relations **consanguineal** relationships. Whereas, the family relations the bride acquires after marriage from her husband's side, her father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law etc. are relations by marriage or **affinal** relationships. Likewise, for the groom, his wife's family becomes his affinal kin. When we speak about relations by blood the concept of cultural recognition comes into play and not necessarily connections that are made genetically. As with the case of adoption, fostering and step-relations these are culturally recognised blood relationships though not genetically related. These kinship relations are generally termed as real kinship.

In some societies like the Nāyar of South India as studied by Schneider and Gough (1974), the biological and the social father may not be the same. A Nayar woman is free to begin a *sambandham* (relationship) after her marriage. When a Nayar woman is pregnant either the husband or any of the lovers can claim paternity by paying the midwife and is recognised as the social father. Anthropologists for such cases have distinguished two types of parenthood for mother and father.

- genetrix- culturally recognised biological mother
- mater- social mother
- genitor- culturally recognised biological father
- pater-social father (Barnard 2007:101)

Now let's go back to the example of our wedding. Will it be true if we say only relations acquired by blood and marriage are the people who attend a wedding. Think about it. Besides these two groups of people there is another group known as friends and family friends who are part of a wedding ceremony. These groups of

people though not directly related by blood are in many ways closely associated with our day to day lives. For example in the Christian culture by becoming the ritual sponsor for the baptism ceremony one can become godparents of the child. Godparents take up the spiritual responsibility of a friend's child. They can also take up the responsibility of educating the child if the need arises. The question here in terms of kinship relation is where do we place them in the kins group? Such acquired relations are known as **fictive kinship** which is not real kinship but plays an important role in one's life. Other examples are the terms like 'sisters' in the feminist movement and addressing friends parents as 'uncles' and 'aunts' though not related by blood.

6.1.3 Incest Taboo

The basic rule of kinship is to keep the two categories- consanguineal and affinal relations separate. In simpler terms the blood relatives can never be joined by marriage and this fundamental rule is known as **incest taboo**. Mother son, father daughter, brother sister relationships in terms of marriage is considered taboo. However, exceptions to the rule has also been seen in earlier historical instances when in the Egyptian and Hawaiian royal families, the rule of incest taboo has not been followed. Marriage between siblings had been the norm so as to maintain the purity of the royal blood. Apart from the basic relationship of parents and children and siblings, there is a wide variation in the rules of incest taboo. Like in Hindu society one cannot marry within the same *gotra*. *Gotra* refers to the members who claim their descents from a common line of male ancestors. The *gotra* of husband and wife cannot be same. While in Northern India a marriage cannot take place between members of the same village.

6.1.4 Kinship Affiliations

Till now we have learnt that kinship is acquired either by blood or marriage. The rules of descent followed by a particular society decide the kinship affiliations. Descent is affiliation to ones kin group. Kin group is based on whether the society is matrilineal or patrilineal. In a matrilineal society descent is traced through the mother whereas in a patrilineal society descent is traced through the father. Descent determines the pattern of inheritance of property, authority and power. Affiliation to ones descent group is based on societal norms whether the society is matriarchal or patriarchal.


6.1.4.1 Matriarchal society- the term matriarchal comes from the word matriarchy meaning mother right. In present day societies complete rule of the mother is not seen. What we generally have is a matrilineal society based on lineage and inheritance pattern rather than on authority and power. For example among the Khasi people of Meghalaya, North East India the lineage is traced through the mother and the inheritance pattern specially of the ancestral house follows the matrilineal line wherein the inheritance is by the youngest daughter known as *Ka Khatdduh*. Inheritance by the youngest child is known as the rule of ultimogeniture. In case of authority in decision making it lies with the mother's brother. As the power and authority lies with the male line, rule of the female or mother right is not complete in the true sense of the term.

6.1.4.2 Patriarchal society- such a society is based on father right or patriarchy. In such societies the lineage, descent, inheritance, power and authority is traced through the father. Daughters are part of the father's lineage but in terms of inheritance, power and authority it moves from father to son. The rule of primogeniture is the norm that is the eldest male child becomes the heir. He inherits the property and becomes the head of the family after his father's death. In few patriarchal societies

the rule of ultimo geniture prevails wherein the youngest son inherits the ancestral property. Among the Kachin's of Burma the rule of ultimo geniture prevails.

6.1.5 Genealogy

In kinship studies the relationship between two persons can be established by drawing the family tree known as genealogy. Genealogy is basically tracing your ancestors either the father's or the mother's side to understand the line of descent. Let us understand here the principles of symbols used in drawing a genealogy.

1. A triangle represents a man \triangle
2. A circle represents a woman \circ
3. A box or a diamond represents a person whose sex is not known \square or \diamond
4. A line above two symbols indicates a sibling relationship 
5. An equal sign between two symbols indicates marriage =
6. A horizontal line from the sign of marriage when it goes down indicates parent/child relationship $\overline{\quad}$
7. A dotted or dashed line between two symbols indicates a sexual relationship other than marriage -----
8. A line through a symbol indicates a dead person \triangle/\square
9. A line that cuts horizontally the equal sign indicates a severed relationship (such as divorce) \neq
10. An arrow near any symbol marks the Ego, the reference point of the genealogy \rightarrow

Anthropologists use certain symbols to trace the exact relationship of an ego with the other members in a genealogical chart. Below the terms of reference are detailed herein for your understanding.

F= Father, M= Mother, P= Parent, B= brother, Z= sister, S= son, D= daughter, G= sibling, H= husband, W= wife, E= spouse, e= older (elder), y= younger, ss= same sex, os= opposite sex, gm= grandmother, gf= grandfather, zh= sister's husband, zs= sister's son, zd= sister's daughter, sla= son in law, dla= daughter in law (Barnard 2007:103, et al)

Let us draw here diagrams using the symbols to understand how to trace genealogy.

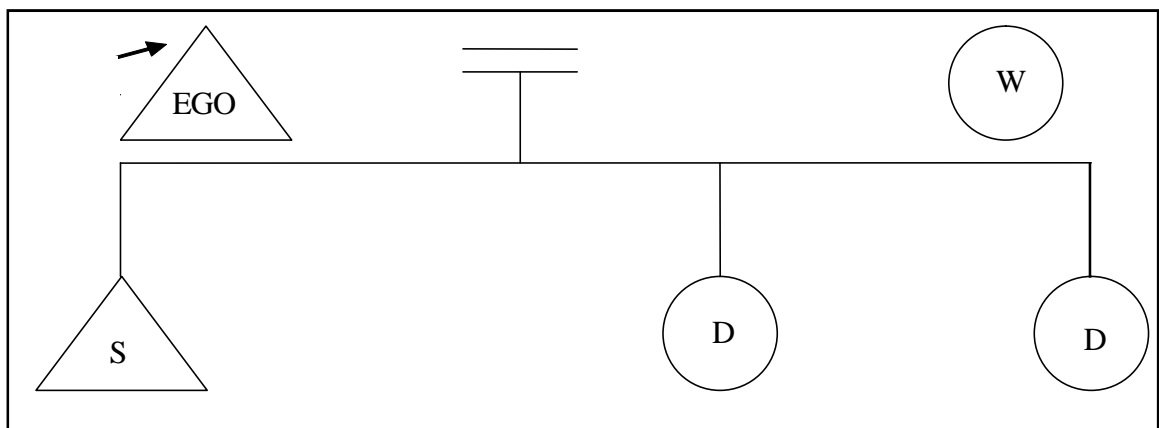


Fig. 1

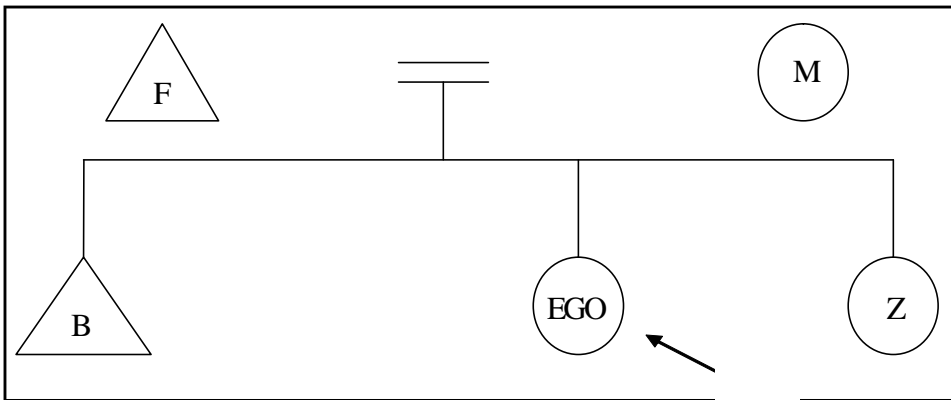


Fig. 2

If we look at Fig-1 and 2 they appear similar but when we read the symbols we see that the figures are not same. This is because of the ego. In a genealogy relationships are traced through the ego. In fig-1 ego's family comprises of his wife, a son and two daughters. In fig-2 ego's family comprises of father, mother, a brother and a sister. Thus, even if we are looking at the same genealogy, the perspective and relations would depend upon the ego from whom the family tree is being traced.

Check Your Progress1

1. What are the two basic ways of acquiring kinship relations?

2. What are relations acquired by blood known as?

3. What are relations acquired by marriage known as?

4. Define real kinship.

5. What is fictive kinship?

Basic Concepts

6. Define incest taboo.

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7. What is descent?

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8. How is descent in a matrilineal society different from a patrilineal society?

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9. Define the rules of primogeniture and ultimogeniture.

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10. What is a genealogy?

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Activity: Trace the relationships in the genealogies given below

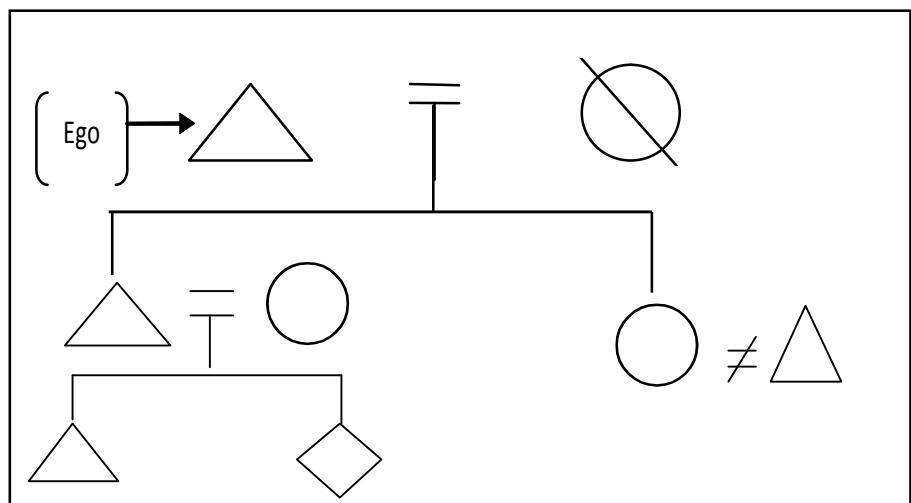


Fig. 3

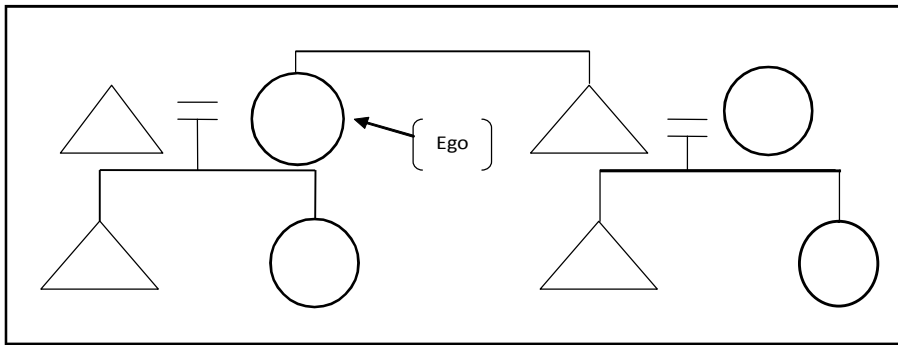


Fig. 4

6.2 FAMILY

In this section we would learn about the meaning of family and the different types of families that are seen in different societies. Our discussion would also pertain to understanding the terms family and household. Variations in the family types based on residence would also be taken up herein.

6.2.1 Types of Families

When we use the term family our own family comes to mind. So let us start this section by listing out the members in our own family to understand the meaning of family. You can use the genealogical method that was described in the section 6.1 on kinship to create your family tree. Now if we are to check the family tree we would basically see that each one of us have included our parents and siblings with whom we live. Some of us might have also added grandparents either from the maternal or paternal side if they are living with us. Basically we list everyone living together in the same house as family. This composition of members living in a family will differ from society to society. Family comprises of people living together who are related either by blood (cognate) or marriage (agnate). Family can be divided into two broad categories- family of orientation and family of procreation. A child is born into the family of orientation where the process of socialisation and enculturation takes place. After marriage a family is created by husband and wife known as family of procreation where they can beget or adopt children. Let us understand the different types of families as described by Barnard (2007:94-95).

- nuclear family- comprises of one married couple with their children, own or adopted
- one parent family- family with only one parent either father or mother living with the children, own or adopted. It can be formed through separation, divorce or death of one of the spouse/widowhood.
- compound family- a central figure (typically a man), his or her spouses, sometimes concubines, and all their children. Such families are seen where polygamous marriages are prevalent.
- joint family- brothers and their wives and children all live together along with their parents. Usually, the authority lies with the father. In countries where agriculture is the main occupation such families are common like in India and China.

- extended family- today with changing times this word extended has lot of ambiguities, on the one hand it means a group of closely-related nuclear families that live together, while in urban and industrial societies it means a group which do not live together but keep in touch.

Now going back to our example of the wedding let's see what type of family is formed based on residence after marriage. In most societies there are rules that a newly wedded couple has to follow while taking up residence after marriage. Herein, we would discuss the types of families based on residence after marriage as described by Jha 1995.

- **neolocal residence** (that is a new place). A new family basically known as nuclear family is formed with only husband and wife after marriage and later on their children, own or adopted become a part of this family.
- **patrilocal or virilocal residence**- when the newly married couple takes up residence in the groom's father's house such a residence is known as patrilocal or virilocal residence.
- **matrilocal or uxorilocal residence**- is created when the couple takes up residence in a matrilocal family i.e. with the bride's family after marriage.
- **avunculocal** residence - in some societies like the Ashanti of Ghana studied by Meyer Fortes a couple after marriage resides with the groom's mother's brother's family or maternal uncles house.
- **ambilocal or bilocal residence**- when a married couple has the choice of living with relatives of either spouse (the husband or the wife) such residence is known as ambilocal or bilocal residence.
- **natolocal residence**- a couple after marriage when they do not reside together but stays with their family of orientation such residence is known as natolocal residence earlier found among the Garos of Meghalaya, the husband used to visit the wife at night and leave her place before sunrise. The authority for the children lies with the mother's brother that is a man is responsible for his sister's children and not his own.

6.2.2 Household and Family

Many a times there is confusion between the term family and household. So let's first try to understand the term household. Household has been defined by Haviland (2003) as the basic residential unit where economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter are organised and implemented. The members of a household at times share a common hearth. Let's take the example of the Mundurucu of the Amazon who organize themselves around a household. They have a unique system by which all men and boys above 13 years of age live together whereas all the women and children below 13 years of age live together (Haviland, 2003). Herein, we see that household is an extension of family, a family can be a household but a household need not be a family. To make this statement clear let's take another example from the present day situation. We see lot of students moving out of their native place and settling in some other city or going abroad for higher education. These students usually on low budget like to share accommodation with fellow students. Thus, two to three students take up residence and start sharing space and eating together. This makes them share a hearth but they are not necessarily members of the same family but belong to different families.

6.2.3 Functions of a Family

The family as a social group is universal in nature and its existence is seen at all levels of cultures. Thus, the family in society also has certain responsibilities and functions. The basic functions of a family are outlined below;

6.2.3.1 Satisfaction of biological need

The family as an institution regularises the satisfaction of biological needs, the primordial need among all humans. Family helps in channeling of sexual outlets by defining the norms with whom one can mate and who are out of bound in terms of incest taboo.

6.2.3.2 Reproduction

A child as we have learnt is born into a family. As soon as a child is born into a family s/he is entitled to certain social position, system of beliefs, language, parents and kins as per the family system that s/he is born into.

6.2.3.3 Economic

A family as a social group is responsible for satisfying the basic needs of its members like food, clothes and shelter. In order to achieve this objective all the members of a family cooperate and divide the work among themselves and make contribution towards the up keeping of the family.

6.2.3.4 Educational

A family nurtures the child and imbibes in the child the ways of the society through the process of enculturation and socialisation, preparing the child to accept status of adulthood.

In case of family also we see new variations in the present day. Live-in relationships have come up as partners or couples live together without marriage. Such relationships are considered legal by law and the children born if any are considered legitimate by law. In India cases of domestic violence in live-in relationships are being taken up in the family court.

Check Your Progress 2

11. Name the two broad categories into which family can be divided.

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12. Name the different types of families.

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13. Name the different types of residences based on different types of families.

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6.3 MARRIAGE

Marriage is found in almost all human societies though the pattern, rituals and customs may vary. The debate still continues as to when marriage came into being and became an integral part of society. Early social thinkers had speculated that in the initial stages of human existence human beings lived in a state of promiscuity where marriage to an individual did not exist. There were no rules and regulations. All men had access to all women and thus, the children born were the responsibility of the society at large. This slowly gave way to group marriage and finally to single marriages. So in this section we would first try to define marriage and then understand the different types of marriages prevalent in different societies. Then move on to the norms and regulations that are to be ascribed to when looking for a match for marriage.

6.3.1 Understanding Marriage

What is marriage? Let us start this discussion with the definition of marriage as given in Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 111, "Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate offspring of both partners". So basically marriage is a sanction which is accepted by the society for a man and a woman to have a relationship and gives them the social sanctity to beget or adopt children. However, let us now explore if in the present world this definition holds true and also try to understand the various types of marriages prevalent in societies. To begin with let's start with the types of marriages that are prevalent in societies.

6.3.2. Types of Marriages

Broadly speaking marriage can be divided into two types a. Monogamy and b. Polygamy.

6.3.2.1 Monogamy

Sanctions marriage to one partner/ person only. Monogamy is further divided into serial monogamy and non-serial monogamy.

- **Serial monogamy** pertains to a state where a man has a series of wives one after the other, but only one wife at any given point of time. For example in the United States where divorce rate is high but only monogamy is legal, serial monogamy is widely noticed.
- **Non-Serial monogamy**- in many societies like the Hindu society of India monogamy pertains to *non-serial monogamy* where a man has a single wife throughout his life. In such societies the divorce rate is rare and as such it is the preferred norm.

6.3.2.2 Polygamy

Is a type of marriage where more than one partner is involved. Polygamy is of three types.

- **Polygyny:** If a man is married to more than one woman it is known as polygyny. The wives of a man if they are sisters or related is known as *sororal polygyny*. In many Islamic countries such marriages are seen. Among the Zulus of South Africa *sororal polygyny* is prevalent. When the wives are not related it is known as *non-sororal polygyny*. In the Coromo islands such marriages are practiced.

- **Polyandry:** When a woman is married to more than one man it is known as polyandry. The husbands if related by blood like brothers or clan brothers such a marriage is known as *fraternal or adelphic polyandry*. Account of fraternal polyandry in Indian Hindu society is seen in the great epic Mahabharata where the five Pandava brothers were married to princess Draupadi. Polyandry even today is found in certain regions of Tibet and Nepal as a socially accepted practice. When the husbands are not related by blood such a marriage is known as *non-fraternal polyandry*. In rare cases like among the Tibetans the husbands are father and sons known as *familial polyandry*. There are many speculations for such a marriage and one of them relates to the small population size of the Tibetans and the high altitude in which they live. A woman if taken as wife from the low altitude areas find it difficult to acclimatise.
- **Polygynandry:** Marriage of several men to several women or in simpler terms a man has many wives and a woman has many husbands at any given time is known as **polygynandry**. Such marriages were earlier prevalent among the Todas of the Nilgiri hills and the Khasas of Jaunsar Bawar of India.

In recent times a third category of marriage has come up known as gay marriages or same sex marriages. The couple comprises of persons belonging to the same sex either two males or two females. In such marriages the society sanctions the couple to legally adopt a child or beget one through surrogacy.

From the above discussed types of marriages we can sum up that the institution of marriage has different patterns. We have come to know that in some societies marriage might involve more than one couple. While in certain societies same sex couples can also marry. So let's just understand marriage as a social sanction given to a couple or a group of people to live together and to either beget or adopt children.

6.3.3 Whom to Marry?

In most societies it is the rule of kinship that defines whom to marry and who is out of bounds. Either prescriptive or preferential norms are followed while selecting a mate. When the rules and norms are strictly followed even when a few members of the category are available for marriage, such norms are described as **prescriptive**. The rules of endogamy and exogamy fall under this group.

6.3.3.1 Endogamy

Is marriage within the believers of the same faith or religion, for example Hindus marry within the same caste group and the tribes marry within the same tribal population. In Hindu society the rules of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* are also prevalent. In the earlier Vedic times the rules of *anuloma* or hypergamy was prevalent where a boy from a higher caste could marry a girl from his own caste or from those below upto three varnas, however in such cases the status of the girl remains the same and only their children gets the father's status. On the other hand in the case of *pratiloma* or hypogamy rule a man from a lower caste may marry a girl from a higher caste, however the girl in such cases loses her upper caste status and the children born are recognised by their father's caste. In earlier times *pratiloma* marriages were not permitted and faced resistance from society.

6.3.3.2 Exogamy

Is marriage outside the group. In Hindu community one has to marry within the same caste group but outside the *gotra*. In societies where endogamy is prevalent parallel

cousin marriage is the preferential norm. Among such societies marriage between first cousins is permitted. Based on the rules of lineage exogamy cousins belonging to different lineage are preferred. For easy understanding the children of siblings of opposite sex (brother-sister) - are called **cross-cousins**; while the children of siblings of the same sex (brother-brother) are called **parallel cousins**. In many of the Islamic societies a man marries his father's brother's daughter known as **parallel cousin marriage** a very rare form of endogamy. The Kurds of eastern and southeastern Turkey still continue with the practice of parallel cousin marriage.

6.3.3 Preferential Marriages

Cross-cousin marriages are the preferential norms in societies where the rule of exogamy is adhered to. A man's lineage is traced either through his mother's or father's side. If the lineage is traced through the father than marriage with his aunt's (father's sisters) daughter is the preferred norm and when lineage is traced through the mother than the preferred norm for marriage is mother's brother's daughter. When a man marries his mother's brother's daughter it is known as **matrilateral cross-cousin marriage** while if he marries his father's sister's daughter it is known as **patrilateral cross-cousin marriage**. In societies where the authority lies with the mother's brother matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is the preferred norm.

Besides the above mentioned prescriptive and preferential marriages, levirate and sororate at times form a prescribed norm for widows and widowers in a few societies. *Levirate* is a marriage form in which after the decease of an elder brother the younger brother is obliged to marry the widow. The term levirate is derived from the Latin word *levir* meaning husband's brother. This is a type of marriage often seen in societies where exogamy is not prevalent. *Sororate* on the other hand is a practice in which a widower marries his deceased wife's sister.

6.3.4 Ways of Acquiring a Mate

The ways of acquiring a mate varies in different societies. In Hindu society of recent past arranged marriage or **marriage by negotiation** was the norm. A match was fixed by the parents of the bride and groom through a mediator. In such marriages either bride wealth or dowry used to come into play. Bride wealth is seen as a compensation given during marriage by the family of the groom to the bride's family. The compensation is made in terms of movable property like goods, currencies or livestock. Mostly seen among pastoral and semi nomadic groups, it is a compensation for the loss of labour in the bride's house. In such communities every member in the family is an asset in terms of labour. Dowry on the other hand is the transfer of goods and currencies from the bride's family to the groom's family. Previously it was a practiced norm in the Hindu society. The tradition of dowry was prohibited in 1961 under Indian civil law and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498A of the Indian Penal Code in India. The move was made to protect the women from dowry related harassment, domestic violence and even death.

Marriage by exchange is also a part of the marriage by negotiation system. Herein, the system of bride wealth or dowry is waived off when instead of goods, daughters are exchanged between two families. Marriage by exchange was also prevalent in the olden days to ward off wars between two kings or groups. This was known as alliance.

Marriage by service is found among some of the tribes of North East India where a groom pays off the bride wealth through service at the bride's place instead of paying through goods or currencies.

Marriage by capture can either be ceremonial or by force. In the first case, as noted by anthropologist Verrier Elwin in the earlier times among the Nagas of Nagaland in India, during raids the men captured the women of the village who were of marriageable age and either married them or kept them as bonded labourers to work in the fields. Such a situation is ascribed as physical capture. In ceremonial capture a boy desiring to marry a girl propositions her in a community fair or festival and makes his intentions towards her known by either holding her hand or marking her with vermilion as was the case among the Kharia and the Birhor of Bihar.

Marriage by intrusion is a type of marriage wherein a girl forces her way into the boy's house and forces him to accept her as his spouse. Such marriages were seen among the Birhor and Ho of Bihar and also among the Kamars of Madhya Pradesh.

Marriage by trial is a process in which the groom has to prove his strength and valour while claiming his bride. Such marriages by trial till recent times was found in many societies in India like the Bhils of Rajasthan and the Nagas of Nagaland. Marriage by trial has also been described in the two epics Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

Marriage by Elopement is a customary marriage in some societies whereas it is looked down in others. In some societies the cost of ritual offerings for the marriage is high and difficult for many families to bear the cost. In such societies marriage by elopement has come up as a customary practice. Such marriages were quite in vogue among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In other cases marriage by elopement takes place when either of the prospective groom or bride's family does not approve of the wedding or when marriage is fixed with a distasteful partner.

In the present era the ways of acquiring a mate is not strictly followed. Today owing to education, globalisation and modernisation in most of the metropolitan cities love matches are most commonly seen where the boy and girl decide on their own whom to marry. Yet in certain parts of India, the caste rigidity is still witnessed in the form of honour killing which have come up in the recent times as a major social concern. The system of live-in where a boy and a girl or same sex couples living together without marriage is also coming up in a big way in present societies.

Check Your Progress 3

14. What are the two broad divisions of marriage?

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15. Name the divisions of monogamy.

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16. What are the different categories of polygamy?

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17. Define endogamy.

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18. Define exogamy.

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6.4 SUMMARY

Kinship as we have studied till now is the social recognition of biological ties which includes adoption. Family and marriage are closely linked to kinship. In the present era kinship studies have become a challenge with the change in marriage and family systems. Today it is difficult to pinpoint a marriage pattern to a particular society or culture as the waves of modernisation and globalisation has touched almost all the societies. Anthropologists are presently more concerned with the changes in family and marriage that brings about changes in kinship and the use of kinship terminologies. Like due to remarriages, children now have more than one set of parents and grandparents and this brings a change in the kinship terminologies.

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6.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Two ways of acquiring kinship relations are a. **by birth** and b. **by marriage**.
2. Consanguineal relationships.
3. Affinal relationships.
4. See section 6.1.2.
5. See section 6.1.2.
6. See section 6.1.3.
7. See section 6.1.4.
8. See section 6.1.4.1 and 6.1.4.2.
9. See section 6.1.4.1 and 6.1.4.2.
10. See section 6.1.5.
11. Family of orientation and Family of procreation
12. See section 6.2.1
13. See section 6.2.1
14. a. Monogamy and b. Polygamy
15. See section 6.3.2.1
16. Polygyny, Polyandry, Polygynandry
17. See section 6.3.3.1.
18. See section 6.3.3.2